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PHILIP GUEDALLA

# Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF  
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

PHILIP  
GUEDALLA



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IT is with clear, unclouded vision that Mr Philip Guedalla looks out on the world of men and things. He has no illusions, a keen eye for absurdities, and the gift of incisive phrasing by which he can fix a fault most memorably. A character or a situation he can sum up at a glance. He is never blind to the pictorial value of a dramatic moment, but he has also an uncanny way of piercing through all the trappings of chivalry and medievalism, as when he pillories "the lumbering procession of heraldry and anachronisms miscalled the Holy Roman Empire." In a phrase he will give you a period; he speaks, for instance, of "the bland readers of 1900." In a sentence he will pass judgment as swift as it is unerring, as when he says that "a lifetime in Eton suits will ruin any man's character." His humour has a sardonic twist, causing such Puckish perversions as "the English dearly love a Laud," and the merciless suggestion that a monument should be erected to the Unknown Writer, with the corollary that, were this done, there would be little competition for the honour. This combination of insight and humour is sufficiently rare that one may well be thankful for Mr Guedalla's desertion of the Bar for the pursuit of Letters. He has already made definite niches for himself in history, politics, and the descriptive essay. Born in 1889, he has, we may hope and expect, many years before him in which to make the sum of his present accomplishment seem small in comparison, and the fact that he is a



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Balliol man would suggest that he has the pertinacity and resolution necessary to use to the full the gifts of Time and Nature.

Thanks are due to Messrs Constable and Co., Ltd., for permission to reprint "The Right Hon. Earl of Rosebery, K.G.," and "Fez," from *A Gallery*, and "The Soldiery" and "Two Princes," from *Masters and Men*; and to Messrs T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., for "Mr Disraeli, Novelist," and "Some Historians," from *Supers and Supermen*. The other essays now appear in book-form for the first time.

F. H. P.

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THE RIGHT HON.  
EARL OF ROSEBERY, K.G.

There are three kinds of statesmen—dead, living, and Elder.

*New Proverb*

IN the high and far-off times, when the political opinions of eight hundred thousand Liberal electors consisted in a convenient faith in the literal inspiration of Mr Gladstone, there was inevitably something a trifle depressing in the situation of his junior colleagues. They filled the remaining posts in the Cabinet with suitable dignity; they assisted in the deforestation of Hawarden with becoming gusto; they read, with due solemnity, the Second Lesson; and they were vaguely visible over an eloquent old shoulder in railway-carriages between Rugby and Chester. But something, some final touch of political virility, seemed always to be lacking in their composition. Perhaps it was because they were kept too long in the nursery. A lifetime in Eton suits will ruin any man's character; and it resulted that when they came into their inheritance, they came like children—some of them rather like spoiled children.

This unhappy inability to grow up (so attractive in children and Conservatives, but so deleterious to the prospects of Liberal leaders) is neatly exemplified in the eternal childhood of Lord Rosebery. His long career has been a painfully protracted adolescence. Sometimes he would play quietly with his toys for years together. But at intervals, swept by those dark impulses which devastate the nursery, he dashed them on the floor and

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went off to mutter in a corner, leaving his little friends in tears, and rather enjoying the anxious speculations of the grown-ups as to how soon he would be good again. This pleasing mutability has a certain charm in childhood; it seems to go with the wide stare and the bright curls. But in a statesman it somehow fails to please. That may explain the limited appreciation of Lord Rosebery. He has always remained political caviare, a morsel of public life which it is rather distinguished to enjoy. Perhaps the reason is that for half a century he has obstinately refused to grow up. As the long years went by, the wide stare grew wider and the bright curls seemed to grow somehow brighter above the smooth face. It is his tragedy that there is no place in English politics for Peter Pan.

In the first phase he was indubitably the white-headed boy of a rather elderly party. Towards the year 1880 the rising hopes of the stern, unbending Liberals were undeniably a little middle-aged. But when Mr Gladstone travelled North to ingeminate woe from Midlothian on Lord Beaconsfield, the old prophet's hands were held up on his hilltop by a charming acolyte. The young Earl was conspicuously unobtrusive in his leader's wake; and the grateful guest responded with a benign conviction that the bright head of his tactful host would one day wear the crown. The idyll might well have ended in a graceful retirement of the old king and quite a charming coronation of his young successor. It was all a little like *King Lear* without Goneril and Regan. But unhappily the Liberal Party abounded in Gonerils. There was a maddening profusion of Regans with talent, with seniority, with superior claims. And Cordelia was a trifle temperamental.

## THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

For a few years he drifted absently in and out of minor office. It is not easy to imagine Lord Rosebery at the Home Office and the Board of Works; and his own imagination was not equal to that effort for any length of time. Indeed, he seemed to be playing rather languidly with the toys of politics, until a bright, new gift absorbed his whole attention. It is the habitual illusion of persons who lack the energy to study the sordid detail of home politics that their genius is rather for foreign affairs. Lured by the broad international horizons, they feel the irresistible appeal of inside information and hear the titillating whisper of diplomacy. It is so tempting to make history; and Lord Rosebery had more excuse than most men for his predilection. He had read; he had travelled widely; and if it came to wearing stars and Garters, he had a leg. Home affairs (especially for Earls) are depressingly parochial. Proficiency in them makes one, at best, a politician. But the Foreign Office is the home of statesmen. That, one feels, was how he drifted into statesmanship with a gusto which, for ten years, almost deceived himself. Sporting eagerly among the red boxes, he revelled in *démarches*, in policies, in spheres of influence. The little head seemed to bend intently over its toys; and gradually the time came near for him to take up his great inheritance.

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that his convictions on the sole subject in which he took an interest were in almost direct opposition to those of his party and of his aged leader. That facile imagination had been captured by the vague appeal of Empire, by the vivid image of a British minister controlling once more the destinies of Europe. The bright vision was scarcely in accord with the humbler requirements of contemporary Liberalism;

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and it gravely contravened the simple principle of Mr Gladstone's foreign policy, which was to do on any occasion what Lord Palmerston would not have done. Lord Rosebery's Imperialism would have been barely noticeable in a Conservative. But for a Liberal it was a notable piece of thinking. It resulted, since original thought is distasteful to well-disciplined parties, that his harmless taste for African protectorates and his anxious eye on Franco-Russian policy were watched with genuine alarm by most good Liberals. Sir William Harcourt was startled by the "attempt to make another India in Africa"; and when he sent some naval returns to his dangerous colleague—"they will gladden your Jingo soul"—he could not resist "one scruple in sending you this paper, and that is lest you should draw the natural inference that the wisest and most prudent thing you could possibly do is to go to war at once, when you can easily destroy all the navies in existence." The humour concealed a deeper discord. Lord Rosebery was suspected, with reason, of Disraelian leanings. He saw his country as the centre of an Empire, and that Empire as the centre of an unfriendly world. He regarded reform at home as the best means of fitting England to play its part abroad. It was his tragedy that, by some odd mischance, he led a party that regarded reform at home as an end in itself and foreign policy merely as a regrettable necessity. His youth, his wealth, his sudden promotion, invite a graceful reference to Prince Charming. But it seemed in 1894 as though the fairy-tale had got somehow wrong. Undeniably, when he sounded his horn, he passed the castle gate and won the princess. Yet, by a singular omission, they failed to live happily ever afterwards.

## THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

The consequences, when they came, were brief and dreadful. The intercourse of ministers had reached a high standard of unpleasantness in Mr Gladstone's later Cabinets, which were reported by scared observers to be "very rough, very rough," or "heated and very Harcourty." But they soared under Lord Rosebery to a *crescendo* of discomfort, from which his unhappy followers were only released by a welcome defeat. They parted company with obvious relief. Perhaps the fallen Earl was a little relieved also, since it was the diagnosis of a shrewd old man that "he funk'd the future which he saw before him—that he felt called upon to say something on politics in general and give a lead, and that he did not know what to say, and so took up his hat and departed."

Such was the inglorious exit of Prince Charming from the enchanted castle. The talisman had worked, beyond a doubt: but perhaps it was the wrong castle. One is left with an awkward suspicion that Lord Rosebery was never politically at ease in the company of Liberals. In the case of Mr Gladstone, he had been willing to overlook his Liberalism, much as Elisha might have tolerated some imperfection in the cut of Elijah's mantle. But when the fiery chariot had done its work, he became more critical of the garment. His distaste for the Irish facet of Liberalism had been barely concealed before; and when it revealed an awkward tendency to correct inequalities of wealth by drastic taxation, he became frankly panicstricken. By an unhappy accident he foresaw the same catastrophe twice over; once in 1894 and again in 1909 Liberal finance evoked from Lord Rosebery a hollow prediction of "the end of all." But the cataclysm, so impressively



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announced, omitted to take place; and the soothsayer silently withdrew after a double event, which would have proved fatal to the reputation of a Major Prophet.

Such was the brief, uneasy contact of Lord Rosebery with English politics. In 1896 he swept the pieces off the board and refused to play. The black mood came. For some time past his fingers had strayed to other toys; the big books in a quiet library and the bright colours of the jockeys on Epsom Downs seemed to catch his wandering attention. The wide stare brightened; and he wrote a little book on Pitt and led in two Derby winners. The toys of politics were half forgotten, and he left the game unfinished. For a few years he seemed to sulk in the nursery corner, while his little friends implored him to go on with the game, offered to make him captain, welcomed every pouting sentence as an oracle of rare political sagacity. But the backward child stayed in his corner; and the career, which had begun among the bright hopes of elderly Gladstonian nurses, faded out to the complete indifference of a less sympathetic generation.

In only one of his diverse pursuits Lord Rosebery seemed to grow up. Racing is always childish; and party politics, as he conducted them, were mainly puerile. But the writing of such English prose as his is the work of a grown man. His reputation in writing seems to have suffered from his other careers. It is so incredible that a Prime Minister should be a stylist; and the Royal Enclosure seems the last place to find a prose-writer. Yet somehow, in a brief interlude between two Governments and in the longer leisure which followed his last retirement, he found time, even found energy, to write consummately well. Always a

## THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

master of the memorial address (his later public life has been spent among centenaries and the uncomplaining statues of the distinguished dead), he brought to the larger forms of historical writing an unusual talent. The rather florid brilliance of his style shocked those austere devotees of the German mode, who prefer their history unreadable. But his study of Pitt was a rare blend of accuracy and epigram; and the deep irony of the portrait painted by a lonely man in his Lowland Elba of a still lonelier man at St Helena was noticed even by the bland readers of 1900. He wrote with a speaker's aptitude for compression; fitting notions were caught and pinned to the page by the sharp turn of his wit; richly allusive, vividly phrased, more than a trifle Asiatic, his prose was a full and honourable employment of ideas and language. Perhaps the best of it is to be found in a slight, green book which he wrote for a mother on that other broken column of English politics, the interrupted, sad career of Randolph Churchill. "Many have risen to the highest place with far less of endowment. And even with his unfulfilled promise he must be remembered as one of the most meteoric of Parliamentary figures, as the shooting-star of politics. . . . He will be pathetically memorable, too, for the dark cloud which gradually enveloped him, and in which he passed away. He was the chief mourner at his own protracted funeral, a public pageant of gloomy years. Will he not be remembered as much for the anguish as for the fleeting triumphs of his life? It is a black moment when the heralds proclaim the passing of the dead, and the great officers break their staves. But it is a sadder still when it is the victim's own voice that announces his decadence, when it is the

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victim's own hands that break the staff in public. I wonder if generations to come will understand the pity of it. . . ." That is how he wrote of Lord Randolph Churchill: I had almost written it of Lord Rosebery.

*From "A Gallery"*

## THE SOLDIERY

ONE would have said at the first blush (and the student of history—especially of Continental history—should always have a blush ready) that the artist who sets out to draw scenes from Swiss history is apt to draw blank. That country, so attractive to the eye and uniformly obliging to the casual visitor, is curiously baffling to the historian. Apart from the distinction of contributing “Zwingli” to the last page of every encyclopædia, it wears singularly few honours in the European record, and the historical imagination falls back on scenes in which nearly all the most prominent parts were played by foreigners. Napoleon crossing the Alps; Hannibal, by a curious association of ideas, doing the same; Mr Gibbon writing in Lausanne; M. de Voltaire writing at Ferney—these, and a few more, appear to be the sole events of European importance in Swiss history, and one arrives gradually at a pained realization that the principal actors in them were not Swiss. Even Baedeker was a German. The national Valhalla (and surely a country so admirably supplied with the raw material of sculpture cannot subsist without a Valhalla) must contain little beyond the unheroic figures of MM. Nestlé and Suchard; and even the bolder gesture of William Tell is too closely associated with a simple article of diet to be completely dignified.

Switzerland, to the uninformed observer, must always seem to be one of those fortunate countries (the United States are another) which have a great deal of geography

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and very little history. Delightful to the map-maker and the railway-engineer as affording such extensive employment to the ingenuity of either, these favoured regions are equally delightful to the schoolboy, because there are no dates to remember. If there was a Declaration of Swiss Independence, no one is expected to know when it took place. If there was ever a Swiss Civil War (beyond the normal competition of rival hotel managements), it has escaped the notice of those indomitable amateurs of civil wars who investigate them for the films. Swiss history is the one subject of which a historian may safely confess ignorance. Even Mr Beerbohm, to whose unwritten history of the Regency we owe so much, almost forgets his urbanity when his pen peoples Switzerland with "a smug, tame, sly, dull, mercenary little race of men"; and when Mr Bernard Shaw wishes to make the profession of arms ridiculous, he introduces a Swiss soldier.

Perhaps they are right. Perhaps the effort of living up to that tremendous background has exhausted the moral resources of the Swiss, until they have become little more than the tiny (but quite faceless) human figures which adorn the foreground of every competent landscape-drawing. Yet one discovers with half a shock that the upper valleys of the Alps were not always populated by a race ready to oblige with an echo or some *edelweiss*, that there were Swiss industries before the loud tick of a cuckoo-clock had ever sounded across the mountain pastures, that Switzerland, in fact, possessed in its time most of those virtues of the mountain-tops which are associated, in the imagination of Mr Lloyd George, with the far lower contours of Wales. There is always something a shade exasperating about the

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republican virtues. It was found by his countrymen to be so in the case of Aristides; and the peculiar quality of 'sturdiness,' which is generally attributed by historians to the inhabitants of undulating territories, makes only the most limited appeal to the imaginative eye. One could wish somehow that their ideal was a shade taller. But in Switzerland the facts are against them.

That is, perhaps, why there is something almost startling in the discovery of the Swiss infantry. There is a dynasty, in the military history of Europe, of the successive masters of Continental battlefields. Before von Moltke's men in spiked helmets it was the Grenadiers of the Guard. Before the French came the Spaniards. And before the slow, pounding step of the Spanish musketeers it was the Swiss pikemen. One half expects to-day to find them charging with the national cry of "Coming, sir"; and there is a good deal of irreverent reminiscence from which one must shade one's eyes, if one is to peer back into a time when tall Switzers lounged in bright colours under the tall arches of Renaissance doorways. Yet in that time, before the national aptitude for neutrality had been developed to its full growth, it was Swiss history rather than Swiss geography that constituted the main interest of the country. The detachment of Switzerland from the lumbering procession of heraldry and anachronisms mis-called the Holy Roman Empire is, for almost all of us, a strange new story. For a moment one sees the bullet-headed little men with a livelier expression in their eyes. But the vision fades; and as it passes, the Swiss are overwhelmed once more by the climate or the scenery. Switzerland becomes again an inert patient on the green

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table of Europe. Wise men bend over her with new prescriptions; Napoleon advises a thorough change of Constitution; some one invents the ignominious expedient of neutrality, which has acted like an anæsthetic on Swiss politics; and through it all Switzerland remains completely, blandly passive, "perfectly civilized and strifeless," as one historian sees her, "jewelled all over with freedom."

There is no gleam of the old light, no faintest echo of the heavy step of the Swiss infantry. We have instead the mild tap at the door, the cautious tread, the bright deposited tray of our kind familiar Swiss, with their "nine thousand six hundred pairs of sheets and blankets, with two thousand four hundred eiderdown quilts . . . ten thousand knives and forks, and the same quantity of dessert-spoons . . . and three native languages." That is the last that Europe sees of the pikemen of Marignano. One has an uneasy feeling that if an invading army passed the Swiss frontier, its luggage would be taken upstairs, whilst a courteous management arranged to accommodate all officers above the rank of major in rooms with a view of the glacier. Even the republican milk of mountain pastures is sold in tins at grocers' shops, whilst the citizens of the Confederation perform kindly but unimpressive duties in the grill-room.

Yet the exiled Swiss may have a future (it would be quite in their tradition), when the proletariat, having finally succeeded in learning one of those stirring songs which young gentlemen of the middle class are always writing for it, marches on the West End. There will be pale faces in the American Bar, and a low drone of men calling on the Prophet from the deft, dark persons whose

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normal occupation is the confection of strong coffee in small cups. But from somewhere up the street they will hear a hoarse cheer, as the long line of white shirt-fronts drives at the Revolution in the last charge of the Swiss Guard.

*From "Masters and Men"*



## FEZ

SOMEWHERE in the town a drum was throbbing. The little pulse of sound seemed to go straight up in the silence over the city, like a tall thread of wood smoke into a windless sky. But all round the great place lay out in the still sunshine; and the grey hills, where the olive-trees climb up into the Middle Atlas, looked down on Fez. There is something a little alarming about a city without a sound. When one stands above a town in the West, there is always a striking of clocks, a dull thunder of wheels, or the sudden yell of an engine. But down in the little streets which wind through Fez there is no traffic beyond men on foot and sheeted women and the faint click of ambling mules and little donkeys that brush their loads against the walls on either side. That is why scarcely a sound drifts up, as you look out across the city.

It is a grey, congested heap of square-topped houses, filling a whole valley, climbing the little hills, and huddled behind the shelter of the city walls. Tall towers stand up out of the mass, where the *muezzin* goes up between the city and the sky to quaver out the hours of prayer; and beyond the minarets one catches the sudden green of a great roof of tiles. But the memory that will remain is of a heaped grey waste of houses lying silent in the sun. As one stared, it seemed to stare silently back; and somewhere in the town a solitary drum was throbbing.

The little alleys wind in and out among the houses. Sometimes they vanish into tunnels under the piled city,

## FEZ

or pick their way across the chessboard shadows of a reed-roofed market. The blue sky comes suddenly round corners, and swarming streets end in the little hill-streams which pour through Fez. There is a sound of rushing water everywhere in the city. It goes whispering under humped Moorish bridges and mutters like a stage conspirator in little strangled tunnels below the heaped grey houses. The great town had seemed so silent from the hills above. But down in the maze, where the veiled women slip discreetly by in the half-darkness of the streets, it is alive with little sounds. Whispering water, the slow lilt of men at work, snatches of high, wailing, minor plainsong (Spain learnt its music at the knees of Africa), low chants from little schools, the tapping hammers of the coppersmiths, are all caught between the tall, blind walls; and the hooded men crouch talking at every corner. The men and the water all talk low. Perhaps that is how Fez muttered ten years ago, before it came yelling down the little streets to murder stray, bewildered Frenchmen in the massacres. In Fez one can never quite forget that spring.

But one day the grey city made remarkable holiday. It shut up shop in the early afternoon and went pouring westward up the hill in its best kaleidoscopic clothes. The tide of the traffic set steadily towards the Palace gates. Soldiers, great droves of women, elegant young gentlemen on mules streamed up the little alleys, as tall negroes went elbowing through the press; and solemn citizens, who lie all day in little cupboards three feet square to sell a pinch of green tea for a copper and an hour's conversation, abandoned the excitements of commerce for the keener joys of spectacle. His Shereefian

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Majesty was on the road from Rabat; and was it not fitting that his city of Fez should receive the Sultan at the gates? From the great square before the Palace there was a steady roar, and the gorged streets still poured late-comers into the mass. They stood and pushed and shouted; and sometimes, discarding all false dignity, they swept through the crowd, fifteen abreast, arms linked, knees up, and singing to the steady thunder of their little earthenware drums. Above and behind them were the gates whose great square battlements had so alarmed the romantic imagination of M. Pierre Loti; and somewhere in the middle loud arguments and a faint gleam of bayonets indicated that anxious French officers still hoped to keep a road open for the procession.

Royalty was late. But Fez resorted freely to the consolations of song and dance. Rings formed in the crowd; and the little drums throbbed without ceasing, as indomitable loyalists jiggled steadily up and down in line, and hillmen in circles sang interminable choruses. Then a gun spoke from the green fort beyond the town, and the heads all turned to the roadway between the bayonets.

There was something odd about that procession from the first. It opened with four closed cars, which glided in perfect silence and with drawn blinds up to the Palace. There was a roguish intimation that these contained a selection of the Imperial harem; and we gathered from the small number that Majesty was making only a short stay in Fez. Followed four open cabs, containing (one heard it with a mild thrill) the Keepers of the Door, come straight from *The Arabian Nights* to guard the Sultan's harem. The misleading art of Ballet had taught one to believe that these figures

## FEZ

of romance would wear a vivacious, almost a festal air; and to the heated Western imagination those four cabloads of dejected men in pointed red fezzes were a bitter blow. The Sultan of Morocco seemed to have neglected the opportunities afforded to him by M. Bakst. Eunuchs in cabs . . . One waited gloomily to see a station-omnibus full of mutes with bowstrings. But the salutes were still thudding from the battery on the hill, and the infantry in the road sprang suddenly to the "Present." There was a clatter of horses under the great gates; and a stream of men in white went riding by with long five-foot flintlocks from the Sûs, sitting the great coloured saddles stiffly with feet driven well home into their square stirrups.

Then the colours changed, and negro lancers jingled past in red. Pennons, black faces, scarlet tunics took the procession to the border-line of opera. There was a pause; and a band launched into the ceremonial discords that are reserved for royal ears. The crowd was roaring in the square; and when it paused for breath, the shrill *you-you-you*, which squeals for victory or drives men on to kill, came from the women in their corner. The French guns spoke slowly from the battery; and down in the road, at the centre of the din, a grave bundle of white linen moved deliberately through the noise and watched with unseeing eyes the prostrations of anxious Kuids. For the Sultan had come into his city of Fez.

*From "A Gallery"*

## MR DISRAELI, NOVELIST

WHEN a distressed posterity inquires why it must look to a man who wore bottle-green trousers and far, far too many watch-chains, for the richest picture of English society in that brilliant period which intervened between the divorce of Queen Caroline and the motherhood of Queen Victoria, the reply must be that after all it takes something of an outsider to be really romantic about English society. For it is only from the outside that any great institution, whether it is a Gothic cathedral, a Government Department, or a London club, can be really impressive. Nothing is sacred to the initiated. No valet, as it has been wisely said, is a hero to his master. Dukes hold no mysteries for Duchesses, and Baronets seem scarcely wicked to their wives.

That is why there has always been something a trifle exotic, if the language of the hothouse may be applied without ineptitude to Mrs Humphry Ward, about the literary appreciators of the great world. It is by a similar irony that the nostalgia of Sussex, that chosen homeland of persons who do not belong there, appears to have affected most strongly among their contemporaries Mr Kipling, who is Anglo-Indian, and Mr Belloc, who is Anglo-Gallic. But one need not have week-ended with the Merlins in order to write a good account of Broceliaunde. Indeed, it would almost seem from the record of English social fiction as though it were only from outside the charmed circle that one can get a really good view of the incantations.

## MR DISRAELI, NOVELIST

Disraeli, who delighted to see in the British country-house an Olympian resting-place of semi-divine personages between the exercises of the Palæstra and the subtleties of the Senate (one catches the flavour!), was born in Theobald's Road. Du Maurier, who is for ever ushering us into a drawing-room that culminates in the tiara of a Duchess at the end of a long avenue of athletic bishops and majestic peeresses, was more than half a Frenchman and lived at the top of Heath Street. And Henry James, who saw unutterable depths of significance behind the stolid mask of British society, spent half a lifetime in the endeavour to forget that he was American-born. So scattered and so queer are the origins of those who have found in Mayfair their spiritual home.

But romance came natural to a young man who first put an author's pen to a publisher's paper in the year 1825. George IV, ignorant of the fatal but posthumous fascination which he was to exercise on Mr Max Beerbohm, was king; and Stephenson was fumbling laboriously towards a type of locomotive which should resemble a trifle less acutely that kettle which had been his earliest inspiration. But Napoleon was only four years dead, Byron had two years to live, and it was the authentic age of romance. If the moon shone then, you may be sure that it shone fitfully, through ragged clouds, and to an accompaniment of hooting owls upon a world populated almost exclusively by youthful knights and aged abbots. That is the right, the true romance. But the young Disraeli sought it elsewhere. Lytton looked for it always among the last of a species—the Last of the Barons, the Last of the Romans, the Last Days of Pompeii. But Disraeli

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characteristically found it among the first families in England and the highest in the land. He introduced to the astonished country of his adoption the high romance of the upper classes.

The discovery was announced in a publication which he subsequently stigmatized as "a kind of literary *lusus*" with that free play of Latinity which is habitual to those whose facility in the dead languages has not been arrested by a classical education; and from the first page of *Vivian Grey* to the last page of *Endymion* he continued to work that richest of all mines, the respect of the Anglo-Saxon for his betters.

He worked it, if one may say so, with *panache*. His magnates lived in greater pomp, his peeresses moved with more exuberant circumstance than those of any rival practitioner. Who can forget that perfect scene "in the morning-room of Brentham"? The Duchess was there, of course; one forgets the title, but surely it is enough to remember that "the Duchess, one of the greatest heiresses of Britain, singularly beautiful and gifted with native grace, had married in her teens one of the wealthiest and most powerful of our nobles, and scarcely older than herself." Is that enough to set the tone?

. . . in the morning-room of Brentham, where the mistress of the mansion sate surrounded by her daughters, all occupied with various works. One knitted a purse, another adorned a slipper, a third emblazoned a page. Beautiful forms in counsel leant over frames glowing with embroidery, while two fair sisters, more remote, occasionally burst into melody, as they tried the passages of a new air, which had been communicated to them in the manuscript of some devoted friend.

## MR DISRAELI, NOVELIST

That, as an inelegant later age delights to say, is indubitably the stuff, the whole stuff, and nothing but the stuff to give them; and the man who wrote those burning words was, when he wrote them, an *ex-Chancellor* of the Exchequer. Could Mr Bonar Law do as much?

It was a rich, warm night at the beginning of August, when a gentleman enveloped in a cloak, for he was in evening dress, emerged from a club house at the top of St James's Street and descended that celebrated eminence.

When Mr Chamberlain gives us the novel which we have so long looked for, one wonders wistfully whether it will begin quite like that.

It is in the tone of these passages that Disraeli pitched the whole of his marvellous tale. His Earls were sometimes Dukes and sometimes Marquises; and once or twice (for the English dearly love a *Laud*) they were high ecclesiastics. But the scene was always set with alabaster and plush curtains, and the gas-jets were turned high to screaming-point, as the flunkeys lined up along the walls and the house-party swept past on its way down to dinner—two Dukes, a Premier, and the Mingrelian Ambassador—and you marvelled, as they went by, to see how easily Mr Disraeli mingled with this exalted company. That was the fare with which the heated social imagination of this young man provided his countrymen, and it is at least more satisfying than the half-hearted snobbery of his later competitors. Mrs Humphry Ward's Dukes take off their white kid gloves to begin dinner; Disraeli's draw them on.

The social picture was not Disraeli's sole asset. There was his wit, his wisdom, his incredible verbal



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felicity besides. Fifty years before Wilde's young men were born, he was making all their dandy jokes in the intervals of leading the Opposition; and when he sat down for a little recreation after the General Election of 1880, that old, defeated, weary man with the fallen cheeks and the dyed forelock sent up *Endymion* in three volumes of such fireworks as had not been seen since young Mr D'Israeli first came upon the Town. But it is from his demerits that Disraeli derives his principal value as a Victorian antique. Just as the collector of curios *fin de siècle* now loves to surround himself with the wrong shapes, the bad colouring, the indefensible taste of the objects which disgraced his grandmother's drawing-room, so there is for the collector a wild splendour, a distorted magnificence, an unattractive beauty about Disraeli's social scene. He is a genuine antique, and as such he has a value.

*From "Supers and Supermen"*

## THOUGHTS IN SANCTUARY

THE collective efforts of the Prime Minister, Mr Jacob Epstein, and Mr Cunninghame Graham, supported (as dramatic critics say) by an influential and representative committee, has released the Silly Season eight weeks or so before its time. One is prepared for this kind of thing in August, when tactful editors replace the more disturbing forms of news with a really sedative controversy. "Should Girls . . . ?" "Do Bishops . . . ?" "Can a Dean . . . ?" These eager questions waft us to the seashore. One can almost catch the languid flop of summer waves. The sand is in our shoes; the unyielding shingle conforms inadequately to our shoulder-blades; the air is cheerful with the cries of children coming up for the second time.

But here it comes in May, one symptom more of the senseless craving of our age for hurry. "Mother of Nine" inquires from Walham Green what art is coming to. "R.A.," in sterner tones, tells her where it has gone, and obligingly appends a list of his principal works. Jocose reporters crouch behind trees to record the conversations of startled nursemaids. A Park policeman is prevailed upon to vouchsafe his impressions to a wider public; while several architects of that restless type which aches perpetually to perform Olympic feats of town-planning by throwing Charing Cross Station across the river find glorious pretexts in this innocuous health-resort for sparrows.

Yet how few, in the sudden uproar, have alighted on the real point for congratulation. It leaps to the

## PHILIP GUEDALLA

eye, though Mr Baldwin was restrained by tact from alluding to it at the unveiling. For one observes with glee that there is hardly any sculpture. There might, of course, be less. But it is only just to remember that there might equally be more.

When first one heard obscurely that a distinguished writer was to be commemorated, one winced and thought of marble trousers. Military men protect themselves against this posthumous form of ridicule by adopting a style of leg-wear that defies the worst excesses of the sculptor. Spurs and riding-boots are not ignoble; they seem to retain their shape, even in studios. But plastic tailoring is pitiless with civilians. Disdaining braces, they sag precariously in crowded streets; although the most perilous cases have sought refuge in the Central Lobby of the House of Commons. But when forced into the open, they seemed to adopt the oddest disguises. George Canning emerges perpetually from his eternal Turkish bath, though next to him the quaintly trousered form of Lincoln exhibits to the full the sartorial recklessness of a New World. Fearing the sculptured trouser, Disraeli shrouds himself in a peer's robes; and just across the way Lord Palmerston extends a railway rug at posterity in a perpetual, mute request to wrap him up. Some, indeed, prefer to end below the shoulders in a square pedestal and a symbolical lady; and far down the Embankment Sir Joseph Bazalgette, warned by the fate of Brunel, conceals himself in one of his largest drain-pipes and lies full length to watch the trams go by.

That fate, which overhung the memory of Hudson, has been averted. He does not stoop, life-size, to press a bronze flower between the adamantine leaves of a

## THOUGHTS IN SANCTUARY

bronze book or sit perpetually, pen in hand, groping through all eternity for the right word. He even escaped the milder torment, to which our sentence on the dead is often commuted, of staring in profile on a medallion like an eternal parody of a half-crown. One feels that, on the whole, we have been merciful with Hudson. His spirit is, as it were, let off with a caution. Other offenders may be dealt with more severely, like Burns, who got the maximum penalty—for writing in dialect, no doubt. But the Prime Minister or Mr Epstein or Mr Cunninghame Graham has been almost compassionate with Hudson.

Not that the risks would have been smaller in any foreign capital. Discussion of our monuments invariably provokes an ill-timed burst of national humility. But monuments are just as funny abroad. In Germany, of course, the dead writer would have been popped into some huge Valhalla, with a warning by Baedeker (*Adm.* 10-5. *Guardian* 1 *Mk.*) against visiting it without wraps after sundown. He might even, had he worn spectacles in life, have retained them, like Herr Friedrich Krupp in his eternity of myopia outside the Yacht Club at Kiel. One might suppose that men of letters die happier in France. But they can foresee, if they know their Paris, a dismal prolongation of their existence in a frock-coat of lambent marble on an uncomfortable marble seat. Perhaps they will droop a little, and a merciful rug spread on the failing legs may spare them the worst. But a large, sorrowing lady will trail along the ground, slightly immodest but extremely allegorical; whilst the cruel marble restrains through all eternity the writer's chivalrous impulse to lend her his rug.

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But there is a graver feature. A gifted writer upon nature dies; and we enclose a small slice of nature in his honour. Is it, one asks a little nervously, to be a precedent? We have commemorated Hudson's prose with a railing round a fragment of Hyde Park. Are we to honour Conrad's with a railing (rustless) round a small segment of the Serpentine? One can almost see the scene—a respectful company in boats, whilst kindly hands on shore air blankets at the Royal Humane Society's. The voices come faintly across the water, as the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries dedicates this charming fish sanctuary to the memory of an aquatic writer, upon whom his private secretary has furnished him with the relevant facts. And then a mild controversy in the Press as to the suitability of some one's colossal nude of Venus rising from the Serpentine.

Soon the whole Park will bristle with names and dates. Lovers will meet by George Meredith (squirrels) or at Cunninghame Graham (the large horse sanctuary near Hyde Park Corner); and the Park, the old, uninforming, incommemorative Park, will be a faded memory of vulgar grass and trees, wholly devoid of literary associations.

Have we not reached a point at which the public foot might be, quite reverently but quite firmly, put down? We have preserved the Park for people, not for statues. Field-Marshal's ramp outside. Prime Ministers who know their place remain at Westminster. And if our men of letters insist upon admission, let us concede to them one simple stone inscribed "To the Unknown Writer." From what I know of literary men, there will be little competition.

[1925]

## MONS—GALLIPOLI

THERE is a certain state of mind, unless perhaps it is a state of health, which prefers its hopes forlorn. It can only breathe in the tense air of disaster; and failure has quite a success with it. Any student of opinion will tell you that, with a British posterity, one sound, romantic defeat will go twice as far as three vulgar victories; and nothing in London is more significant than the fact that Gordon, who failed, is in Trafalgar Square, whilst Napier, who succeeded, has penetrated no further than Waterloo Place. Contemporaries may be incommoded by the loss of a war; but posterity, if the historians know their business, is a glutton for failure.

This temper, which is as early as the *Chanson de Roland* and as late as the latest book on the Dardanelles, is not entirely peculiar to these islands; but it is on British territory that it has found its fullest expression. Deriving small satisfaction from the monotonies of military success, and taking little pleasure in the brass and cymbals of triumphant marches, it turns a sensitive ear to catch the wailing minor and the muffled drums as the Lost Legion goes by. It feeds, like some sick bee, upon the shrunken laurels of defeat; and if it has a favourite General, he is probably Sir John Moore. Lord Nelson and, in a smaller degree, Lord Kitchener, humoured it when they atoned for a career of victory with a death so ill-timed that it was almost as good as a defeat; and even Mr Kipling, who is at other times a most regular attendant at divine worship on the

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side of the big battalions, paid an unusual tribute to the British taste for reverses when he dwelt lovingly on the panic of the "Fore and Aft," known to a less chauvinistic *Army List* of the early Nineties as "The Fore and Fit, Princess Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen-Auspach's Merthyr-Tydfilshire Own Royal Loyal Light Infantry."

The mood is a queer one, with its sentimental hankering after frustrated effort. It loves the bridges to go down behind an anxious army; it rejoices as the Matabele come in with the *assegai* between the white-topped waggons of the *laager*; and it is never so happy as when a British square is broken in the desert south of Korti and the Baggara sweep in, slashing and stabbing round the jammed Gatling. Its taste is all for the half-lights and the subdued tones of unsuccess; and it is, so far as it relates to military failure, a peculiarly British taste. One cannot remember any Roman writer who felt the wistful charm of Carrhæ; Jena Day was never widely celebrated in Prussia; and one had not heard that an unduly prominent place is occupied by the Armada in the curriculum of the Spanish primary schools. But an island people is agreeably inclined to apply to land warfare romantic canons by which it would never dream of measuring failure in the more serious fields of commerce or war by sea. There is no spotlight of romance centred on heroic bankrupts or unsuccessful admirals. It is only on land that the English display this engaging temper of retrospective defeatism.

Four years of war have inevitably provided this mood with some highly promising raw material. There is a queer tendency in the purveyors of our War literature to prefer the stormy romance of Mons and the sunlit

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tragedy of Gallipoli to the simpler, more direct appeal of victory in Palestine and Mesopotamia or the decisive triumphs of the French summer of 1918. The historical instinct is a sound one, when it focuses the attention of posterity upon the opening moves in the great game; and there is, besides the sentimental appeal of it, a real importance in the growing literature of Mons and the Marne. The history of Europe for a generation to come, and perhaps the life of mankind in the whole future which remains to it, was profoundly modified by the events of that hot harvest-time of 1914, when the fine flower of German military education drew a bow at anything but a venture, and missed. It is true that it took the Allies four years to win the war which the Germans had lost in 1914; but the history of any month of those four years which followed is of less significance than the story of any half-hour in the six weeks which had gone before.

General Lanrezac's story is in many ways the most illuminating. One begins in it at the very beginning, when the wires were still humming between the European capitals with solutions of the Serbian *impasse*. A roomful of Generals sat round a table in the Rue Saint-Dominique, and an imperturbable old gentleman with a heavy moustache smiled indomitably (and even a trifle irritatingly) at his anxious questioners. One General came away from the conference asking fretfully whether Joffre "had an idea"; and one is left with an uneasy feeling that if he had, it was the idea of Wilkins Micawber. It is desolating to realize that upon these frivolous old gentlemen, with their false mystery and their half-developed 'science' of war, rested the continued existence of European democracy. No spectacle



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of equal inadequacy was presented to mankind until the meeting of the Peace Conference nearly five years later, when the pigmies went mudlarking round the foundations of the New Jerusalem.

After this vivid glimpse of an August afternoon in Paris, the story deepens; and one has the torturing spectacle of French Headquarters straining their eyes eastwards for the dust of the German advance, whilst the fevered Lanrezac on the Belgian frontier insisted in tones of increasing asperity that the danger lay in the North. At this point the Germans take up the tale, and General von Kluck takes station on the right of the German line to sweep across Belgium, swing half-left, and then, shepherding an unwilling flock before him, to drive down from the frontier into the heart of France. He struck and failed; and the story of that failure is told by him in the level tones of an official memorandum, drafted in 1915 and revised three years later, at a time when there was still a German Empire and a legend of Teutonic invincibility, but a deposed Army commander might strike a more impressive attitude in the theatre of posterity by transferring a little blame to Great Headquarters.

It is the function of the technical military historian to undramatize the most dramatic events in history; he could probably reduce *King Lear* to an appreciation of the general situation on the Heath, operation orders of the French army, and a despatch from the Earl of Kent to the Secretary of State for War. General von Kluck has purged his drama of all its pity and all its terror with more than Aristotelian thoroughness; and one would hardly guess, without looking at the place-names, that the even voice with its Staff College pedantry was telling

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the tale of that incredible August, when men fought all day and marched all night and remade a world in the white dust of the French roads. It all reads so like the report of an Army Inspector on the autumn manœuvres of 1912 that one waits automatically for the crashing charge of massed cavalry with which a courtly Staff generally titillated the military imagination of Imperial Majesty; and one starts at the sudden discovery of a real enemy killing and being killed, and a *finale* on the Marne which owed nothing to German stage-management.

The story of Mons found a happy ending on the Marne; but Gallipoli marches towards its catastrophe like the *Agamemnon*. In the first act lighthearted warships slide up and down a blue sea, tossing shell into nineteenth-century forts. Follows a pause, in which an amiable gentleman took orders in a room in Whitehall; and then a party of Generals found themselves installed in a cruiser to watch the Navy batter its head against the Narrows and draw off, with the little ships huddled round the mined, lopsided battleships. Then came an interlude to martial music in Egypt, when Sir Ian, thoroughly attuned to the historical significance of his command, took the salute at a review in the sand outside Alexandria and went home to write in his diary: "High, high soared our hopes. Jerusalem—Constantinople?" But the answer to his eager question was—Gallipoli.

His diary is, on the whole, the best document that has come out of the War. When he followed the Japanese in Manchuria as a mere Military Attaché, he managed to convey more of the meaning of war in *A Staff Officer's Scrap Book* than any writer on it since Tolstoi; and when the commander of the

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Mediterranean Expeditionary Force turns its historian, he writes not only the best book on the War, but, in one judgment, the best book on war. His *Odyssey* (for, like Odysseus, Sir Ian Hamilton was born in the Ionian Islands) is a brilliant achievement. He has a keen eye for detail and a vivid historical imagination; and his grasp of the general contours of the wood does not disable him from pointing out the amusing shape of many of the trees. Indeed, it is the vivid drawing of his details which helps to burn the whole picture into one's memory. Lord Kitchener at his desk "with flashing spectacles"; the conning-tower of the *Queen Elizabeth* during the landing on the Peninsula; those awful boats off Ocean Beach ("Several boats are stranded along this no man's land; so far all attempts to get out at night and bury the dead have only led to fresh losses. No one ever landed out of these boats, so they say"); and the night sounds at sea ("Half an hour the bombardment and counter-bombardment, and then there arose the deadly crepitation of small-arms—no messages—ten times I went back and forward to the signal-room—no messages—until a new and dreadful sound was carried on the night wind out to sea—the sound of the shock of whole regiments—the Turkish 'Allah Din!'—our answering loud 'Hurrahs'")—such pictures as these are raw, living history written down by a man who helped to make it. The literary accomplishment of them may scandalize the illiterate taciturnity of some of our conquerors. But Gallipoli was not lost because Sir Ian could write English: one should never forget that Napoleon, who was as successful as most Sandhurst soldiers, talked incessantly from birth and produced thirty-three volumes of correspondence.

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The history of the affair appears pitifully clear from Sir Ian's journal. First, the soldiers were put in to watch the sailors win. Then submarines thrust their grey snouts into the blue waters of the Levant, and the sailors, their skirts tucked tightly round their ankles, stood by to watch the soldiers win. They did not win in the first chapter, because Sir John French was to end the War at Loos and required for that purpose the entire resources of the Empire. They did not win in the second chapter, because Mr Lloyd George had discovered by the aid of a small-scale map that the War was to be won in the suburbs of Salonika, and the Government diverted to the aid of Serbia the men who might have marched into Constantinople. It is a queer story that Sir Ian tells, between his official correspondence and his etchings of war. In his gracious retrospect Gallipoli, for all the horror of its failure and its unburied dead, is touched with an odd quality that is almost charm, drawn from a thousand friendships and ten thousand sacrifices. "How sad and mad and bad it was—But then, how it was sweet!"

*From "Supers and Supermen"*

## A RUSSIAN FAIRY-TALE

ONCE upon a time there was a poor Moujik who, feeling that he was not quite poor enough, destroyed his means of ever becoming any richer. He did this with the aid of great natural powers of destruction and an imperfect recollection of something that he had once read in a German book. When his task was completed, the Moujik began to feel extremely hungry. But since the text-book had directed him to destroy all accumulations, he had no means of satisfying his rising appetite. At this moment he was intensely gratified to observe the approach of a Good Fairy with a Celtic fringe.

“Ah, my friends!” the Good Fairy began, more from force of habit than otherwise.

The Moujik, unable to repress a distant memory of the feudal system, bowed profoundly. This appeared to gratify the Good Fairy, who believed that all fairies were equal before the law, but held strongly that some fairies were more equal than others. But at that instant the Moujik, recollecting his principles, called the Good Fairy a number of bad names and said that he was hungry.

“Ah, my friends!” the Good Fairy began again, preparing (as his practice was) to remind his hearer that his sufferings were due to the Capitalist System, under which he lived. But, fortunately, he remembered in time that the Moujik lived under a purer system and made no further reference to the subject.

“Your need,” said the Good Fairy, “is for commodities.”

## A RUSSIAN FAIRY-TALE

"What penetration!" exclaimed the Moujik, and very nearly bowed a second time. "But I have no money to buy them with. I did not believe in the utility of money until I began to feel so hungry."

"That," said the Good Fairy, "will be all right. You can borrow the money on reasonable terms from private capitalists."

At this word the Moujik uttered an angry exclamation which the Good Fairy affected not to hear. He said it twice, and added, "I have shot them all."

"Oh, no," said the Fairy, "there are several remaining in countries which still lie in the darkness of outworn economic shibboleths. I know one or two myself. They would no doubt advance the money on reasonable terms."

"But," said the Moujik, "I do not believe in paying back."

"Hush," said the Good Fairy.

There was a short pause for reflection, and the wind sighed drearily across the steppes. The Moujik, who was really feeling remarkably hungry, moaned a little and began to wish that he had not been quite such a good shot.

"What would you say," said the Fairy, "to a guarantee?"

"What's that?" inquired the Moujik.

"Of course," the Good Fairy cried, "you have forgotten the base devices of an exploded system. A guarantee is easy. The fairies would promise to pay back the capitalists in case you failed to do so."

A slow smile broke across the Moujik's face. "But are the fairies like that?" he asked.

"Not all of them," replied the Good Fairy, "but

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some of them. Especially those who would not have to pay."

The Fairy and the Moujik smiled together.

"We might explain," the Fairy added, "that the fairies would secure the privilege of making all that you require. That would be good for them."

"Would it," the Moujik asked, "if I had the things they made?"

"Of course it would, stupid," the Good Fairy said, a little ruffled, "because they would be paid for making them."

"Yes," said the Moujik, "but if they promised to pay for them, the silly fairies would be paying themselves, and I should keep all the things."

"Hush," said the Fairy.

[1924]

## SOME HISTORIANS

IT was Quintilian or Mr Max Beerbohm who said, "History repeats itself: historians repeat each other." The saying is full of the mellow wisdom of either writer, and stamped with the peculiar veracity of the Silver Age of Roman or British epigram. One might have added, if the aphorist had stayed for an answer, that history is rather interesting when it repeats itself; historians are not. In France, which is an enlightened country enjoying the benefits of the Revolution and a public examination in rhetoric, historians are expected to write in a single and classical style of French. The result is sometimes a rather irritating uniformity; it is one long Taine that has no turning, and any quotation may be attributed with safety to Guizot, because *la nuit tous les chats sont gris*. But in England, which is a free country, the restrictions natural to ignorant (and immoral) foreigners are put off by the rough island race, and history is written in a dialect which is not curable by education, and cannot (it would seem) be prevented by injunction.

Historians' English is not a style; it is an industrial disease. The thing is probably scheduled in the Workmen's Compensation Act, and the publisher may be required upon notice of the attack to make a suitable payment to the writer's dependants. The workers in this dangerous trade are required to adopt (like Mahomet's coffin) a detached standpoint—that is, to write as if they took no interest in the subject. Since it is not considered good form for a graduate of less than



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sixty years' standing to write upon any period that is either familiar or interesting, this feeling is easily acquired; and the resulting narratives present the dreary impartiality of the Recording Angel without that completeness which is the sole attraction of his style. Wilde complained of Mr Hall Caine that he wrote at the top of his voice; but a modern historian, when he is really detached, writes like some one talking in the next room, and few writers have equalled the legal precision of Coxe's observation that the Turks "sawed the Archbishop and the Commandant in half, and committed other grave violations of international law."

Having purged his mind of all unsteady interest in the subject, the young historian should adopt a moral code of more than Malthusian severity, which may be learnt from any American writer of the last century upon the Renaissance or the decadence of Spain. This manner, which is especially necessary in passages dealing with character, will lend to his work the grave dignity that is requisite for translation into Latin prose, that supreme test of an historian's style. It will be his misfortune to meet upon the byways of history the oddest and most abnormal persons; and he should keep by him (unless he wishes to forfeit his Fellowship) some convenient formula by which he may indicate at once the enormity of the subject and the disapproval of the writer. The writings of Lord Macaulay will furnish him at need with the necessary facility in lightning characterization. It was the practice of Cicero to label his contemporaries without distinction as "heavy men"; and the characters of history are easily divisible into "far-seeing statesmen" and "reckless libertines." It may be objected that although it is sufficient for the

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purposes of contemporary caricature to represent Mr Gladstone as a collar or Mr Chamberlain as an eye-glass, it is an inadequate record for posterity. But it is impossible for a busy man to write history without formulæ; and, after all, sheep are sheep and goats are goats. Lord Macaulay once wrote of some one, "In private life he was stern, morose, and inexorable": he was probably a Dutchman. It is a passage which has served as a lasting model for the historian's treatment of character. I had always imagined that Cliché was a suburb of Paris, until I discovered it to be a street in Oxford. Thus, if the working historian is faced with a period of "deplorable excesses," he handles it like a man, and writes always as if he was illustrated with steel engravings:

The imbecile king now ripened rapidly towards a crisis. Surrounded by a Court in which the inanity of the day was rivalled only by the debauchery of the night, he became incapable towards the year 1472 of distinguishing good from evil, a fact which contributed considerably to the effectiveness of his foreign policy, but was hardly calculated to conform with the monastic traditions of his House. Long nights of drink and dicing weakened a constitution that was already undermined, and the council-table, where once Campo Santo had presided, was disfigured with the despicable apparatus of Bagatelle. The burghers of the capital were horrified by the wild laughter of his madcap courtiers; and when it was reported in London that Ladislas had played at Halma, the Court of St James's received his envoy in the deepest of ceremonial mourning.

That is precisely how it is done. The passage exhibits the benign and contemporary influences of Lord Macaulay and Mr Bowdler; and it contains all the

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necessary ingredients, except perhaps a "venal Chancellor" and a "greedy mistress." Vice is a subject of especial interest to historians, who are in most cases residents in small county towns; and there is unbounded truth in the rococo footnote of a writer on the Renaissance, who said *à propos* of a Pope: "The disgusting details of his vices smack somewhat of the morbid historian's lamp." The note itself is a fine example of that concrete visualization of the subject which led Macaulay to observe that in consequence of Frederick's invasion of Silesia "black men fought on the coast of Coromandel and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."

A less exciting branch of the historian's work is the reproduction of contemporary sayings and speeches. Thus an obituary should always close on a note of regretful quotation:

He lived in affluence and died in great pain. "Thus," it was said by the most eloquent of his contemporaries, "thus terminated a career as varied as it was eventful, as strange as it was unique."

But for the longer efforts of sustained eloquence greater art is required. It is no longer usual, as in Thucydides' day, to compose completely new speeches, but it is permissible for the historian to heighten the colours and even to insert those rhetorical questions and complexes of personal pronouns which will render the translation of the passage into Latin prose a work of consuming interest and lasting profit:

The Duke assembled his companions for the forlorn hope, and addressed them briefly in *oratio obliqua*. "His father," he said, "had always cherished in his heart the

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idea that he would one day return to his own people. Had he fallen in vain? Was it for nothing that they had dyed with their loyal blood the soil of a hundred battlefields? The past was dead, the future was yet to come. Let them remember that great sacrifices were necessary for the attainment of great ends, let them think of their homes and families, and if they had any pity for an exile, an outcast, and an orphan, let them die fighting."

That is the kind of passage that used to send the blood of Dr Bradley coursing more quickly through his veins. The march of its eloquence, the solemnity of its sentiment, and the rich balance of its pronouns unite to make it a model for all historians: it can be adapted for any period.

It is not possible in a short review to include the special branches of the subject. Such are those efficient modern text-books in which events are referred to either as 'factors' (as if they were a sum) or as 'phases' (as if they were the moon). There is also the solemn business of writing economic history, in which the historian may lapse at will into algebra, and anything not otherwise describable may be called 'social tissue.' A special subject is constituted by the early conquests of Southern and Central America. In these there is a uniform opening for all passages, which runs:

It was now the middle of October, and the season was drawing to an end. Soon the mountains would be whitened with the snows of winter and every rivulet swollen to a roaring torrent. Cortez, whose determination only increased with misfortune, decided to delay his march until the inclemency of the season abated. . . . It was now the middle of November, and the season was drawing to an end. . . .

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There is, finally, the method of military history. This may be patriotic, technical, or in the manner prophetically indicated by Virgil as *Belloc, horrida Belloc*. The finest exponent of the patriotic style is undoubtedly the Rev. W. H. Fitchett, a distinguished colonial clergyman and historian of the Napoleonic wars. His night attacks are more nocturnal and his scaling-parties more heroically scaligerous than those of any other writer. His drummer-boys are the most moving in my limited circle of drummer-boys. One gathers that the Peninsular War abounded in pleasing incidents of this type:

### THE NIGHT ATTACK

It was midnight when Staff-Surgeon Pettigrew showed the flare from the summit of Sombrero. At once the whole plain was alive with the hum of the great assault. The four columns speedily got into position with flares and bugles at the head of each. One made straight for the Water-gate, a second for the Bailey-guard, a third for the Porter-house, and the last (led by the saintly Smeathe) for the Tube station. Let us follow the second column on its secret mission through the night, lit by torches and cheered on by the huzzas of a thousand English throats. "—— the ——s," cried Cocker in a voice hoarse with patriotism; at that moment a red-hot shot hurtled over the plain, and, ricocheting treacherously from the frozen river, dashed the heroic leader to the ground. Captain Boffskin, of the Buffs, leapt up with the dry coughing howl of the British infantryman. "—— them," he roared, "—— them to ——"; and for the last fifty yards it was neck and neck with the ladders. Our gallant drummer-boys laid to again, but suddenly a shot rang out from the silent ramparts. The 94th Léger were awake. *We were discovered!*

## SOME HISTORIANS

The war of 1870 required more special treatment. Its histories show no peculiar characteristic, but its appearances in fiction deserve special attention. There is a standard pattern:

### HOW THE PRUSSIANS CAME TO GUITRY-LE-SEC

It was a late afternoon in early September, or an early afternoon in late September—I forget these things—when I missed the boat express from Kerplouarnec to Pouzy-le-roi and was forced by the time-table to spend three hours at the forgotten hamlet of Guîtres-le-sec, in the heart of Dauphiné. It contained, besides a quantity of underfed poultry, one white church, one white *mairie*, and nine white houses. An old man with a white beard came towards me up the long white road.

"It was on just such an afternoon as this forty years ago," he began, "that——"

"Stop!" I said sharply. "I have met you in a previous existence. You are going to say that a solitary Uhlan appeared sharply outlined against the sky behind M. Jules' farm." He nodded feebly.

"The red trousers had left the village half an hour before to look for the hated Prussian in the *cafés* of the neighbouring town. You were alone when the spiked helmets marched in. You can hear their shrieking fifes to this day." He wept quietly.

I went on. "There was an officer with them, a proud, ugly man with a butter-coloured moustache. He saw the little Mimi and drove his coarse Suabian hand upward through his Mecklenburger moustache. You dropped on one knee——" But he had fled.

In the first of the three *cafés* I saw a second old man. "Come in, monsieur," he said. I waited on the doorstep. "It was on just such an afternoon——" I went on. At the other two *cafés* two further old men attempted me with

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the story; I told the last that he was rescued by Zouaves, and walked happily to the station, to read about Vichy Célestins until the train came in from the south.

The Russo-Japanese War is a more original subject and derives its particular flavour from the airy grace with which Sir Ian Hamilton has described it. Like this:

WAO-WAO, Jan. 31.—The *rafale* was purring like a *mistral* as I shaved this morning. I wonder where it is; must ask ——. — is a charming fellow with the face of a Baluchi Kashgai and a voice like a circular saw.

11.40.—It was eleven-forty when I looked at my watch. The shrapnel-bursts look like a plantation of powder-puffs suspended in the sky. Victor says there is a battle going on: capital chap Victor.

2 P.M.—Lunched with an American lady-doctor. How feminine the Americans can be.

7 P.M.—A great day. It was Donkelsdorp over again. Substitute the Tenth Army for the Traffordshires' baggage waggon, swell Honks Spruit into the roaring Wang-ho, elevate Oom Kop into the frowning scarp of Pyjiyama, and you have it. The Staff were obviously gratified when I told them about Donkelsdorp.

The Rooskis came over the crest-line in a huddle of massed battalions, and Gazeka was after them like a rat after a terrier. I knew that his horse-guns had no horses (a rule of the Japanese service to discourage unnecessary changing of ground), but his men bit the trails and dragged them up by their teeth. Slowly the Muscovites peeled off the steaming mountain and took the funicular down the other side.

I wonder what my friend Smuts would make of the Yentai coal-mine? Well, well.—“*Something accomplished, something done.*”

## SOME HISTORIANS

The technical manner is more difficult of acquisition for the beginner, since it involves a knowledge of at least two European languages. It is cardinal rule that all places should be described as *points d'appui*, the simple process of scouting looks far better as *Verschleierung*, and the adjective 'strategical' may be used without any meaning in front of any noun.

But the military manner was revolutionized by the War. Mr Belloc created a new Land and a new Water. We know now why the Persian commanders demanded "earth and water" on their entrance into a Greek town; it was the weekly demand of the Great General Staff, as it called for its favourite paper. Mr Belloc has woven Baedeker and geometry into a new style: it is the last cry of historians' English, because one was invented by a German and the other by a Greek.

*From "Supers and Supermen"*



## MR BELLOC: A PANORAMA

IS it (perhaps it is) a discourtesy to tell Mr Belloc that there are too many of him? His name is, so to speak, a collective, but scarcely a generic, noun; and the public mind, which is rarely equal to recognizing a performer in more than a single part, begins to reel a little. For he is not only a prophet, but a procession; and the effect upon the patient observer, as he moves across the contemporary scene with the stamp and thunder of a stage crowd, is sometimes a trifle confusing. One feels that there are moments when, even for himself, he must create something of a traffic problem, when there is a hold-up at his crossroads, as one of him goes by and blocks the way for all the others.

First, of course (and one feels sure that he would put him at the head of that marching column), there is a lyric poet, who plays airs of singular restraint and regular time in defiance of the best—or is it the worst?—contemporary models. This slight and wistful figure is followed in the line by two totally distinct varieties of poet. One of them, a noticeably stouter gentleman, persists in roaring drinking-choruses with a strong geographical bias in favour of villages in Sussex; whilst his friend, a thin-lipped, almost a morose person, dispenses rhyming satire about dons and public men. Then, four abreast and swinging down the road, come the serried files of prose-writers. A journalist elbows his way to the front and, sometimes a little shrilly, denounces public men for being Jews and Jews for the same offence; a historian of unusual eloquence declaims gravely

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upon the Revolution with a slight, but noticeable, French accent; a geographer makes little sketch-maps of Roman roads and mountain ranges and compares notes with the historian; whilst a well-known expert upon the art of war expounds the elements with the explanatory air of a determined teacher putting a particularly awkward piece of trigonometry to a deaf pupil of limited mathematical attainments. There is a novelist or so in the procession, a notable pedestrian, and even (for nothing human is, within Nordic limits, alien to Mr Belloc) an economist. A slightly erratic politician denounces stray abuses with an exquisite gift for personality; and somewhere down the line an essayist follows the casual curves of his irregular course. But one feels that he is rather looked down on by the others as a literary man. So, with a happy burst of marching-songs and statistics and drinking-songs and devotional music and diagrams and sketch-maps, they all swing past in the sunshine; and as the happy crowd goes down the road, one is left staring a little ruefully after them into the dust.

I make no pretence that this Homeric catalogue is exhaustive. If, as they say, you do not see in the window the article that you require, Mr Belloc has probably got it somewhere inside. I have omitted an artillery-driver, a considerable archæologist, the patient editor of Mr Lambkin's *Remains*, and the voluble encyclopædia which once vociferated its way down the *Path to Rome*. Mr Belloc has not yet, so far as I am aware and patient inquiry avails me, written an opera. But it would surprise none of his admirers to learn that he was engaged on one. For one may count the art-forms which he has never practised and the branches of

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learning which he has never professed on the fingers of one hand. This terrific multiplicity of interests, which alarms a feeble generation, belongs to an earlier, braver age. We are accustomed to the narrow claims of the specialist, that depressing *ignoramus* who has all the singleness without the eloquence of Single-speech Hamilton. Mr Belloc belongs to the older, wilder species of Men (as they used to be called) of Letters, learned men at large in the universe with a mind, a general education, the habit of cheerful dogma, and—better than all—a style.

It is instructive enough to watch him reduce a problem to its most elementary terms, state its axioms with elaborate lucidity, define his words, slaughter imaginary objectors, and announce his conclusions with a slow, unanswerable dignity that would leave his auditors far too exhausted to make an answer, even if there were one. It is fun to watch him bowl the professors over, scatter the politicians (dealing particular destruction among the enemies of religion and light refreshment), and defy with his ringing challenge the few remaining infidels who doubt the literal inspiration of the French people upon those rare occasions when it has deviated into republicanism.

But best of all, in one judgment, is to hear him play with a strange, lingering skill the incomparable instrument of English prose. He draws from those stiff keys (for under his hand they are often a little stiff) the full melody of which they are capable. His irony is sometimes a trifle jagged; and perhaps his solemn fun is a thought too solemn. The grave face which he preserves during those interminable farces is sometimes apt to check the laughter, and there are other moments

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when he is just a trifle boisterous for the modern palate. But put him at the highest fence of all—descriptive writing, at one of those scenes which demand, from the very nature of the event, a vivid picture viewed with repressed emotion—and he will paint you a picture, write you a page of prose, which stays in the memory. And what prose-writer can do more?

One remembers Mr Clutterbuck with glee, and innumerable guns with awe, and political skits with a faint sense of irritation. His skill at spinning an essay out of nothing is fantastic. He starts from nowhere in pursuit of nothing; hangs it with strange festoons of erudition about the habits of horses, Roman roads, the Faith, or a forgotten corner of an obscure military operation in the last century but two; and ends, as an essayist should always end, nowhere.

Perhaps his strange fecundity of random invention sometimes misleads him. These casual meanderings, at one extreme, are apt to exasperate almost as much as his undue precision at the other. But between the two, when he is neither flitting across ten topics in six lines or expounding a single truism in four pages, comes the true exercise of his own skill, which is the vivid presentation of historical scenes in the measured tones of a singularly pure English.

His *forte* is, as has been written, the repression of all emotion; and his peculiar gift is the suggestion of it, in the course of a plain description, by the quiver of a single phrase. Events which drive other narrators into an ecstasy of little sobs or an *abandon* of gesticulation, leave him unmoved. The catalogue of facts moves plainly on without disturbing his composure. But the grave voice, the measured utterance, is far more moving to his reader

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than the whole pantomime of emotional effects. The end of *Danton*, whole pages in *The Eye-witness*, and, above all, the closing scenes of *Marie Antoinette* display the method at its highest. There is the grave procession of events, viewed with steady eyes; the slow list of facts recited in a level voice, until

upon that scaffold before the gardens which had been the gardens of her home and in which her child had played, the Executioner showed at deliberation and great length, this way and that on every side, the Queen's head to the people.

That is a delicate use of English prose, a firm handling of the most difficult instrument in the whole range of language; and Mr Belloc leaves us in his debt for a few pages of it more valuable than his learning, finer than his fun, and (dare one say?) more important than all his opinions.

[1924]

## TWO PRINCES

**H**ISTORICAL parallels, even since Einstein, rarely meet. Our masters are frequently tempted to displays of impressive information by the faint similarity of widely separated events, and the common result is a distortion of two sets of facts and the substitution of a common denominator of falsehood in the mind of a bewildered public. The career of Napoleon I was twisted almost beyond recognition to provide historical analogies for Napoleon III, and innumerable statesmen have been misrepresented in order to enable a journalist to observe, in that knowing way of theirs, that they went to Canossa. But one may, without being Procrustean, detect a resemblance between the two pallid boys who faded out of history when the French beheaded their King in a great square and the Russians shot their Emperor in a little room. There is the same sad flavour of predestined futility about the Dauphin and the Tsarevitch—the same lingering tenderness of the world in their early youth, succeeded by the same harsh questions of democracy when they were old enough for martyrdom, and even the same faint, haunting doubts of history as to how and when they ended.

Historians, although their style would not lead one to think so, are almost human. Those thin lips, which pay to the fall of dynasties the grudging tribute of a platitude, are sometimes twisted into a smile. Those pillars of public rectitude have little private lapses; and that cold eye, which observes in the grinding passage of centuries little more than the material for an instructive

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sketch-map, lights up at home when there are sausages for tea. But there is one point at which their human weakness is permitted to stray into the frozen wilderness of their work. The most solemn historian goes down like a schoolgirl before a mystery. His bare study is littered with clues, and he will follow a false scent with all the activity of the meanest of God's office-boys that ever bought an evening paper for an unconfirmed confession of an undetected crime. They stare in fascination at the Man in the Iron Mask. They fill monographs with conjectural ingenuity about the *Letters of Junius*. They toy archly with exalted scandal about the Archduke Rudolph and the shots in the dark at Meyerling. But they assume their most mysterious air when a winter sun drops behind the great tower of the Temple in 1793 and a pale boy is half seen at a window.

There is something queer about the story. When the drums rolled in the Place de la Révolution and the drop of a sloping knife made a widow of Marie Antoinette, the boy in prison became King of France. For twelve months of his reign he was seen about the Temple. His games, his birds, his lessons, that dreadful day when he made against his mother the charges which they had taught him are all recorded. But after a day in 1794 the story is muted. No one seems to see him; there is a queer silence in the Temple; the princesses in the room above catch hardly a sound from the prison. Some one was there—a patient, rather stupid child who fell ill and eventually died. When he was dead, the doctors did queer things which made him almost unrecognizable. That is the story from which half a hundred pretenders have started, each claiming to be

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## TWO PRINCES

the Dauphin; and when one reads it, one can hardly doubt that one of them was right.

If there is a mystery, there is only one man to solve it. The method of M. Lenôtre has been applied to countless problems of the Revolution. It is the patient, tedious, fascinating method of the police. He will leave nothing to his own imagination, and in the result his careful accumulation of detail fires his reader's. One would give all the rhapsodies of all the sentimental historians for one page of M. Lenôtre, with his vivid evocation of the scene. Other men make perorations over Marie Antoinette; he gives one the inventory of her prison furniture, and one may finger the damask on her chairs by spending a few moments in one of his footnotes. It is a method of infinite patience, and it is the ideal manner for a student of mysteries. A man may paint the story of Louis XVI in broad, bright strokes. But one cannot follow his son into the half-darkness without a more careful guide.

The key, if there is one, lies somewhere in the politics of 1794, when the bright light of the Revolution was beginning to waver and men were looking round them for a way of escape. There was a young King of France in prison; and if some group could only put him forward it might end the Revolution and govern in his name. Hébert and Danton had the notion. Perhaps they carried it out and took the boy away. But they died too soon. Then Robespierre had the notion: he came to the Temple, and the boy was sent to Meudon. But they brought him back to Paris; perhaps he was not the King after all. Robespierre died on a summer evening; and after him Barras removed the boy from prison, and left another in his place. The boy in prison died, and



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they buried him. But somewhere in France the boy who had left prison in 1794 was still living.

He might return. He did, when the Revolution had died down, return in large numbers. One of him was an elegant creature who was widely believed in, and even enlisted the credulity of a bishop. But there was a duller, heavier man who came from New Orleans in 1815. They stared at him when he landed at St Malo, and he spoke in a yokel way. He was a baker—*le petit mitron* of the old songs of 1795—and King Louis XVIII exhibited only the faintest enthusiasm for the discovery of his predecessor. Perhaps he was the King. He was stupid enough.

*From "Masters and Men"*

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